

FOREIGN RADIO REACTION TO THE FALL OF DIEN BIEN PHU

Western Reaction:

Western radios pay tribute to the heroism of the Dien Bien Phu defenders, depicting the battle as a symbol of French sacrifice in behalf of the entire free world. There are expressions of hope that the Western attitude may stiffen, counterbalanced by fear that the Communist victory may dangerously affect troop morale and that the West's position in Geneva may be weakened.

Outright censure of French policy comes from Madrid, which calls the surrender of the fortress a consequence of French weakness and sees as the only realistic Western course a return to "the difficult policy of ultimatum proposed by Dulles." The broadcast foresees "the slow unfolding of a Potsdam for Asia" unless a harder Western stand is assumed. German broadcasters, pointing out that much German blood has been shed in the Dien Bien Phu battle, call the outcome of the fight a "tragic miscalculation" on the part of the French. "Those who turned the jungle outpost into something like a last bulwark and symbol of Western resistance are solely responsible if the West enters the Indochina conference in bad shape," the Berlin TELEGRAF declares. Austrian comment follows the German line, noting the sacrifice of German blood, stressing the inextricable link between Europe and Asia, and criticising France for allowing Germans to give their lives for France while preventing them from contributing to European defense.

French newspapers, quoted by the Paris radio, generally call for a reassessment of French policy, the right-wing press underscoring the urgent need for Western unity at Geneva and left-wing papers demanding "negotiation of an honorable peace." The conservative "Figaro" says that Dien Bien Phu fell "because we did not know how to conduct this war" and expresses the hope that the shock of losing the fortress will lead to a determined stand at Geneva. AFP reports that parliamentary circles believe the French Assembly may reopen the Indochina debate postponed by yesterday's confidence vote.

The Saigon radio publicizes Laniel's Assembly statement and Navarre's order of the day. AFP reports from Saigon that civilians there fear that the life of French citizens in Vietnam may now become impossible and that the United States may decide to step in, with the inevitable consequence of Chinese Communist intervention. From Geneva, AFP quotes the head of the Laotian delegation as declaring that his people "are organizing to halt the invasion."

Australia's External Affairs Minister Casey declares that the world would welcome a positive statement by Laniel pledging a continued French fight. Casey deems this essential for a favorable Geneva settlement. The Karachi radio publicizes President Eisenhower's reference to Dien Bien Phu as a symbol of free world determination and Secretary Dulles' suggestion that the fall of the fortress may result in a hardening of Western purpose.

Communist Comment:

Moscow has not yet reacted to Dien Bien Phu's fall beyond quoting a REUTERS announcement. Peking, however, is widely publicizing the official Ho Government radio announcement that the last bastion had fallen, that the entire French command sector at Muong Thanh had surrendered "after the enemy in various posts came out with white flags," that "all fleeing troops were annihilated" by 10 p.m. on 7 May, and that all firing had ceased. There is no specific mention of General De Castries. Peking and Ho Government broadcasts describe the "People's Army" action as "a complete victory."

The Cominform's broadcast to Italy calls an Indochina cease-fire "more than ever necessary," and the Vienna RAVAG's Russian Hour stresses that "all of France is against this war." Bucharest says that the French consider the war "irremediably lost" and that the only way out is negotiation at Geneva. The French defeat, the broadcast says, "is a lesson to the imperialist aggressors who do not want to understand that the era of colonialism is gone forever." The broadcast echoes recent Soviet propaganda to the effect that the American superbombers and war material could not save the French "colonialists" in their "unjust war," and the Vienna Communist press similarly stresses that the French fortress was lost "despite" American aid.

Soviet press spokesman Ilyichev is quoted by RAVAG to support the contention that Western dalliance at Geneva is solely responsible for the failure to reach an agreement on a cease-fire and evacuation of the wounded at Dien Bien Phu, with the consequent loss of thousands of French lives. Ilyichev stressed that the postponement of the talks on Indochina, at which the evacuation of the wounded was to have been discussed, was at the request of the West, and that "not one French delegate took any step to save the life of even a single wounded soldier at Dien Bien Phu." RAVAG says that the Western delegates worked to save only Laniel, not the soldiers.

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